

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
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·U.S. EMBASSIES/>JENNINGS: Good evening. It has been more than a week >TERRORISM>now since American intelligence went on a high state of alert. The signs were there. The signals were there that somewhere in the world, someone would try to attack an American installation, perhaps before the election. There was particular concern about a new terrorist act in the Middle East. And now we learn that during this week, the American military has been preparing to strike back if it happens. ABC's John McWethy is in Washington.

MCWETHY: For more than a week, the U.S. has been secretly holding some military units on 24-hour alert ready to retaliate if terrorists strike any American facility in Lebanon. U.S. government sources say the aircraft carrier Eisenhower, with its 80 combat planes, is being held in the eastern Mediterranean, even though it was supposed to be on maneuvers off Spain. Selected Air Force combat units have been ordered to stand by for quick action, along with tankers to refuel them. At least one Army commando unit has reportedly been in and out of Lebanon in the last month, surveying potential targets. U.S. intelligence sources continue to warn that a terrorist attack could come at any time. Last week there was an attempt at Beirut airport to steal a helicopter. Since then, the U.S. has asked Lebanon to seal off airspace over the American Embassy in east Beirut. Another indicator, U.S. intelligence sources say in recent days, wives and children of several terrorist leaders have been evacuated from their villages in Lebanon, indicating to some that a terrorist strike is near and U.S. retaliation is anticipated. That the U.S. will retaliate, even if innocent civilians and some U.S. servicemen get killed in the process, was a message that Secretary of State Shultz delivered last week in a very tough speech that caught the president and many of his advisers by surprise. ABC News has learned that Defense Secretary Weinberger, the Joint Chiefs and some on the National Security Council were furious with Shultz for making the speech, with some officials suggesting he should be fired. They did not want Shultz to advertise that the U.S. was ready and willing to act, for fear that terrorists might better prepared defenses, meaning more Americans might die trying to get to them and that terrorist leaders might become even more elusive, making effective U.S. retaliation that much tougher. John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.